

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Donaldson Court Apartments

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number 601-615 Westgate Avenue

\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town University City

\_\_\_ vicinity of

congressional district #1 - Hon. Wm. Clay

state Missouri

code 29

county St. Louis

code 189

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
___ district	___ public	<u>X</u> occupied	___ agriculture
<u>X</u> building(s)	<u>X</u> private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational
___ site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	___ entertainment
___ object	___ in process	___ yes: restricted	___ government
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial
	<u>X</u> N/A	<u>X</u> no	___ military
			___ museum
			___ park
			<u>X</u> private residence
			___ religious
			___ scientific
			___ transportation
			___ other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Thomas R. Green, Maxland Dev. Corp. and Baltger Dev. Corp.

street & number 6633 Delmar Blvd.

city, town St. Louis

\_\_\_ vicinity of

state Missouri 63130

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds, St. Louis County Government Center

street & number 7900 Forsyth Boulevard

city, town Clayton

state Missouri 63105

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Missouri Historical Survey

has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_ yes X no

date 1982

\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ county X local

depository for survey records

Department of Natural Resources  
Historic Preservation Program

city, town

P.O. Box 176  
Jefferson City

state Missouri 65102

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	___ original site
<u>X</u> good	___ ruins	<u>X</u> altered	___ moved    date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Donaldson Court Apartments are four three-story concrete buildings located at the northwest corner of Delmar Blvd. and Westgate Avenue in University City, Missouri. Building A has a series of shopfronts on Delmar numbered from 6501 through 6523, while Buildings B, C and D enclose three sides of a court opening onto Westgate. Buildings B, C and D are identically detailed and measure 36½ feet or 3 bays wide; B and C are 98 feet 10 inches or 10 bays long, while D is somewhat shorter at 78 feet or 8 bays. Each of these three has two entries front and back set in the third bays from the ends. Front entrances are recessed under arches decorated with high-relief masks on the keystones and have leaded sidelights and fanlights. Rear entrances are open under segmental arches; rear entrance bays break forward and are decorated between second and third level with ornamental escutcheons; third-level windows are arched, but the lunettes have been closed. Windows in these three buildings are mostly six-light wood-frame casements under single-light transoms, but many have been altered because of deterioration or to accomodate air-conditioners. The windows located one bay from the end are smaller, more nearly square, and lack the transom light. Continuous stringcourses encircle the buildings below window sills on all three levels, and raised moldings also outline the entrances, the rear entry bays, and the corners of the buildings. Broad cavetto cornices are marked by small circular vents centered above the windows.

Building A gives access to its second- and third-floor apartments from its north side, where six three-bay wings frame five corinthian-columned distyle-in-antis porches. Three of these porches shelter niches, while the second and fourth form the actual entries. Each of these porches is topped by a rounded pediment framing an ornamental escutcheon. Windows on this side of Building A are six-over-one double hung, while those on the Delmar side are casements similar to those in the other buildings. The cavetto cornice, shallower than on the other buildings, is topped by a parapet and decorated by rosettes, four to a wing.

The four-bay Westgate end and the long Delmar frontage of Building A were refaced in brick, presumably in 1936. In 1971 the broad continuous fascia between storefronts and second floor windows sills was recovered in maroon-colored vertical metal panels. Similar panels frame the storefronts above a base of small black tiles. This elevation is disposed much like the north one: six three-bay wings flanking five two-bay recesses. Apparently the eleven storefronts originally matched these widths although 6507 and 6515 retain the narrow widths of the recesses. Stepped aluminum ornaments crown the fascia in front of the recesses.

The mottled orange brick is trimmed with beige terracotta tiles forming a string-course above the third-floor windows, framing the center windows of the wings and capping the parapets, which have raised stepped sections centered above the wings. Filling the spandrels between the second and third floors are terracotta decorative panels in beige, ochre and black in a wavy pattern that can only be described as Art Deco. Smaller ornamental panels surmount the third-floor windows, and behind and above these a stepped pattern is formed of convex terracotta panels of a mottled brown.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1922

Builder/Architect Nixon & Keeley/Mauran, Russell & Crowell

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Donaldson Court Apartments are notable as a rare early example of reinforced concrete in residential construction, characterized at the time as "a White Monument to modern construction".<sup>1</sup> They are generally regarded as the most attractive of the many apartment structures built in the eastern part of University City in the same decade. They were designed by Mauran, Russell and Crowell, one of the outstanding architectural firms of the period, using a system of reinforced concrete construction invented and patented by Charles W. Donaldson, the owner of the project.

The firm of Mauran, Russell and Crowell was formed in 1911 when William de Forest Crowell (1880-1967) joined the senior partners, who had already practiced together since 1900.<sup>2</sup> John Larence Mauran (1866-1933) and Ernest J. Russell (1870-1956) were among the most active members of their profession in St. Louis, Mauran as president of the Memorial Plaza Commission in St. Louis, Russell as first chairman of the St. Louis City Plan Commission 1917-1937 and again 1944-1947. Both served as president of the national American Institute of Architects, Mauran 1916-1918 and Russell 1932-1935, while Mauran also served on the Fine Arts Commission for Washington, D.C. on two occasions. Mauran and Crowell were graduates of MIT, and products of its Beaux-Arts approach to design. Mauran had also worked for several years in the office of Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge, the Boston firm that succeeded H.H. Richardson, while Russell for many years lived in the Richardson-designed Potter House at Cabanne and Goodfellow.<sup>3</sup> The firm's work was predominantly commercial and institutional and included many of the best-known buildings in downtown St. Louis: The Railway Exchange Building (Famous Barr), Stix, Baer & Fuller, the Federal Reserve Bank, the Federal Courthouse, the Old Laclede Gas Building, Southwestern Bell, and the Missouri Pacific Building. Their experience with concrete went back at least to 1907 when Mauran, Russell and Garden, as the firm then was, built the Leasan-Gould Building at 1320-24 Washington, a concrete frame with glazed brick spandrels.<sup>4</sup> The next year they produced a vaguely Renaissance reinforced-concrete house for A.B. Shepley at 50 Westmoreland Place.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1920's, concrete was well-established as a building material. Extensively employed during the Roman Empire, it had fallen into disuse until revived beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, at first in relatively uncomplicated poured form, later with more sophisticated reinforcing.<sup>6</sup> The William E. Ward House in Rye, New York, built 1873-76, is thought to be the first reinforced-concrete residence in this country.<sup>7</sup> This was two decades before the church of St.-Jean-de-Montmartre in Paris, the building that is generally thought to have heralded the widespread use of reinforced concrete for artistic as well as purely utilitarian purposes. By the turn of the century reinforced concrete was being used by some of the most innovative designers of the time. In Europe these included Auguste Perret, Robert Maillart, Le Corbusier, Eric Mendelsohn and Walter Gropius. Frank Lloyd Wright produced the Unity Temple in 1906, and Schmidt, Garden and Martin the Montgomery Ward Buildings

- 9.
1. Harris, Nini. Legacy of Lions: A History of University City. University City MO: 1981.
  2. University City News, "Pouring the concrete without forms," August 1923, pp. 23-24.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name Clayton, Mo.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

  
Zone Easting Northing

B 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

  
Zone Easting Northing

C 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

E 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

F 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

G 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

H 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Verbal boundary description and justification North Parkview Subdivision, Block 2; bounded S by Delmar Blvd., E by Westgate, N by former Enright right-of-way and W by former St. Louis Public Service Co. right-of-way.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state Missouri code 29 county St. Louis code 189

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Esley Hamilton

organization St. Louis Co. Dept. of Parks and Rec.

date June, 1983

street & number 1723 Mason Road

telephone (314) 822-8475

city or town St. Louis

state Missouri 63131

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

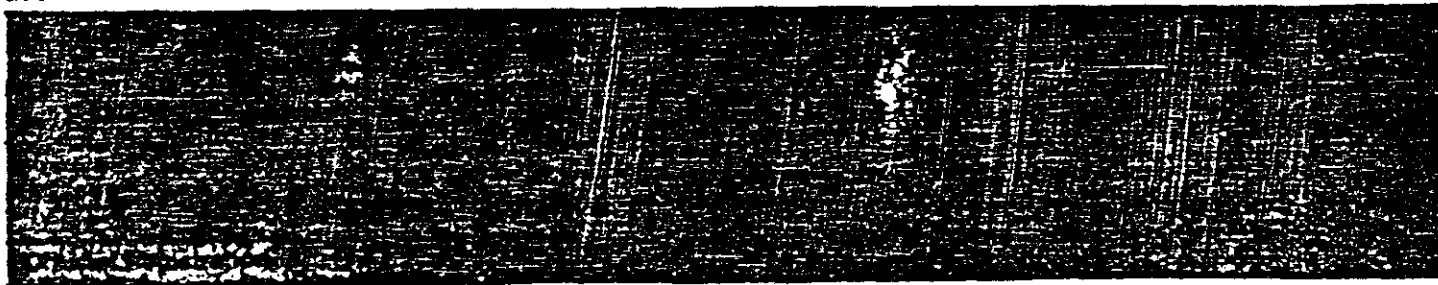
☒ national ☐ state ☐ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

title \_\_\_\_\_

date \_\_\_\_\_



United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet DONALDSON APARTMENTS

Item number 7

Page 1

While the shop interiors have been greatly altered over the years, many of the apartments contain original features including some parquet floors. The Murphy beds the apartments were originally fitted with have been removed, leaving open recesses in some rooms.

A large one-story building housing a garage and service station was originally located at the west edge of the property. It also provided space for the boiler room serving the whole complex. The building was demolished in 1967 and a small new structure was erected over the boiler room. This will be demolished in turn if plans currently being developed for the renovation of the Donaldson Court come to fruition. These plans call for installation of separate heating facilities in each building and a general upgrading of the structures after neglect in recent years. The apartments will be refurbished while the shops will continue as at present.

Note

The drawings for the Donaldson Court Apartments are preserved as Job 1046 in the records of the architectural firm of Henmi and Associates, the successor to Mauran, Russell and Crowell. Architects for the currently proposed renovation are Michael Roth and Associates, Clayton, Mo.

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet DONALDSON APARTMENTS

Item number 8

Page 1

in 1908,<sup>8</sup> but relatively traditional architects in this country employed the new material too. Francis S. Onderdonk depicted many such buildings in The Ferro-Concrete Style,<sup>9</sup> including two well-preserved examples in Los Angeles, the Romanesque St. John's Episcopal Church (1922-23, Pierpont & Walter S. Davis) and the eclectic Los Angeles Public Library (1922-26, Bertram Goodhue & Carleton M. Winslow).<sup>10</sup> This is the context in which the use of concrete in our buildings should be seen. In the Donaldson Court Apartments the plasticity of concrete created fresh interpretations of classic forms that would have been too expensive to execute in traditional materials. While concrete has become the most common construction material, the approach to its use embodied in these buildings is a thing of the past, lost in the Depression and the rise of the International Style. In that sense the Donaldson Court Apartments represent the end rather than the beginning of a tradition.

The building method employed in constructing the complex had been invented by Charles W. Donaldson. "By the use of this system," it was claimed "the builder saves time and material as it requires no forms to cast the columns, beams and floor slabs and produces the most fire-proof building that can be erected."<sup>11</sup> Donaldson is listed in St. Louis directories only for 1922 and 1923, first as vice president of the Donaldson Concrete Construction Company and later president of Donaldson System, Inc. Secretary of the former organization was Clark Nixon, who with his partner John Keeley, Jr., was contractor for Donaldson Court. Nixon and Keeley had offices in downtown St. Louis but were residents of East St. Louis. The Keeley family runs one of the major construction firms on the east side.

When the building permits for the Donaldson Court Apartments were taken out, beginning in August, 1922, the ground was owned by Frank W. Choisel.<sup>12</sup> Choisel was an advertising agent head of his own company and member of an old Carondelet family.<sup>13</sup> He had purchased the property that July from the Cicardi-Ravarino Realty Co. but sold it the following March to Elias Newman. Newman sold it three months later to Charles W. Donaldson, who immediately transferred it to Donaldson System, Inc.<sup>14</sup> Publicity of the time claimed that "Already, a great number of residences have been built by this method," but the only project specifically identified was the Garden Court on Delmar west of Union in the city of St. Louis.<sup>15</sup> This 57-unit U-shaped project is now part of the West End Historic District but disguises its construction under brick facing.

By the 1930's, ownership of the complex had passed to Samuel M. Koplar, a businessman who was Vice President of the Con-Ferro Paint and Varnish Company. In 1936, Koplar took out a building permit for \$27,500 worth of alterations to building A, to be executed by the Koplar-McGowan Construction Company, Joseph P. McGowan, secretary.<sup>16</sup> This presumably resulted in the brick facade with which the Delmar frontage of Building A is faced. While not the primary interest of this complex, this facade is worth noting as an example of the Art Deco Style which was popular in those years.<sup>17</sup>

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCERS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet DONALDSON APARTMENTS

Item number 8

Page 2

## Notes

1. University City News, "Something new in apartments," Sept. 1, 1923, p. 24
2. Some of the bibliographical references on this firm were provided by Landmarks Association of St. Louis. They include John Albury Bryan, Missouri's Contribution to American Architecture (St. Louis: St. Louis Architectural Club, 1928), pp. 82-83; Joan Steiner and Rhoda Sterling, Selections from the AIA Architectural Archive (Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Architects, 1977), unpagged: St. Louis Globe Democrat, September 24, 1933; July 29, 1937; and July 13, 1956; St. Louis Post Dispatch, July 12, 1956 and January 16, 1967.
3. St. Louis Post Dispatch, November 1, 1956. Russell bequeathed this house to the city, which demolished it to create a playground.
4. Information provided by Jill Johnson, office of Historic Preservation, Department of Natural Resources, Jefferson City, Missouri.
5. Information provided by Dr. Thomas Hall, 50 Westmoreland Place. Illustrated in The Western Architect, March 1912.
6. This early history is outlined by Giuseppe Varaldo and Gian Po Zuccotti in "Reinforced Concrete," Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture (New York: Abrams, 1964), pp. 234-241.
7. National Register of Historic Places; Carl W. Condit, American Building Art The Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 223-264.
8. Both are National Historic Landmarks.
9. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1928.
10. For these examples, see also David Gebhard and Robert Winter, A Guide to Architecture in Los Angeles and Southern California (Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, 1977), pp. 209-210, 237.
11. University City News, op.cit.
12. Building Permits 1908, 1931, 1934A, 1935, 1936, University City Building Department; Book 551, page 293, St. Louis County Recorder of Deeds.
13. St. Louis Globe Democrat, April 12, 1949. One of Choisel's sisters had trained under Susan Blow, another Carondelet resident and founder of the kindergarten movement.

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet DONALDSON APARTMENTS

Item number 8

Page 3

14. Book 578, page 201; Book 594, pages 332 and 333.
15. University City News, "Pouring the concrete without forms," August, 1923, pp. 22-24.
16. Building Permit 6420; City Directories.
17. John J.-G. Blumenson, Identifying American Architecture (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1977), p. 77. This style is called "Zigzag Moderne" by Gebhard and Winter, op.cit., pp. 701-702.



**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received

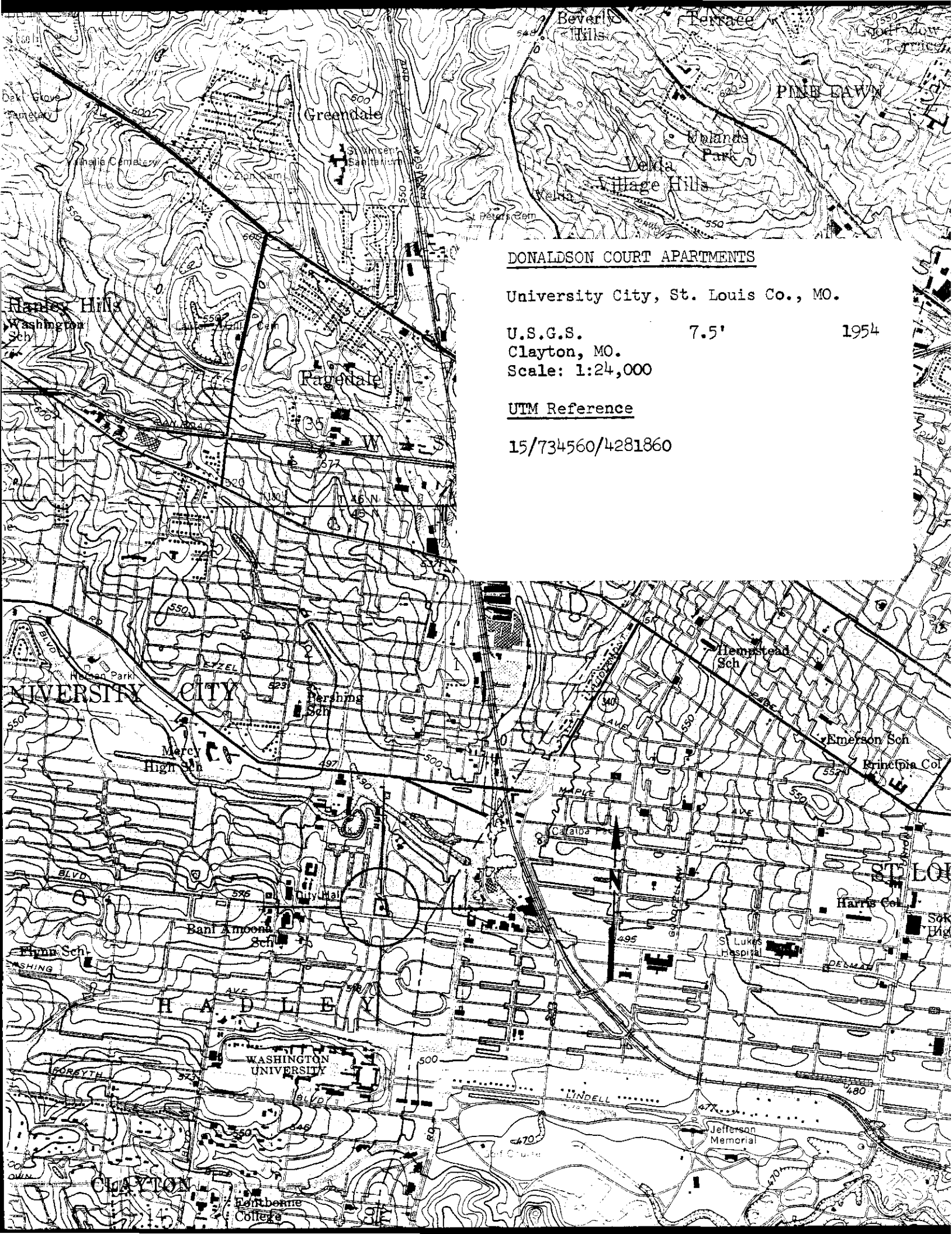
date entered

Continuation sheet DONALDSON APARTMENTS

Item number 9

Page 1

3. \_\_\_\_\_, "Something new in apartments." Sept. 1, 1923, pp. 14-15.



DONALDSON COURT APARTMENTS

University City, St. Louis Co., MO.

U.S.G.S.

7.5'

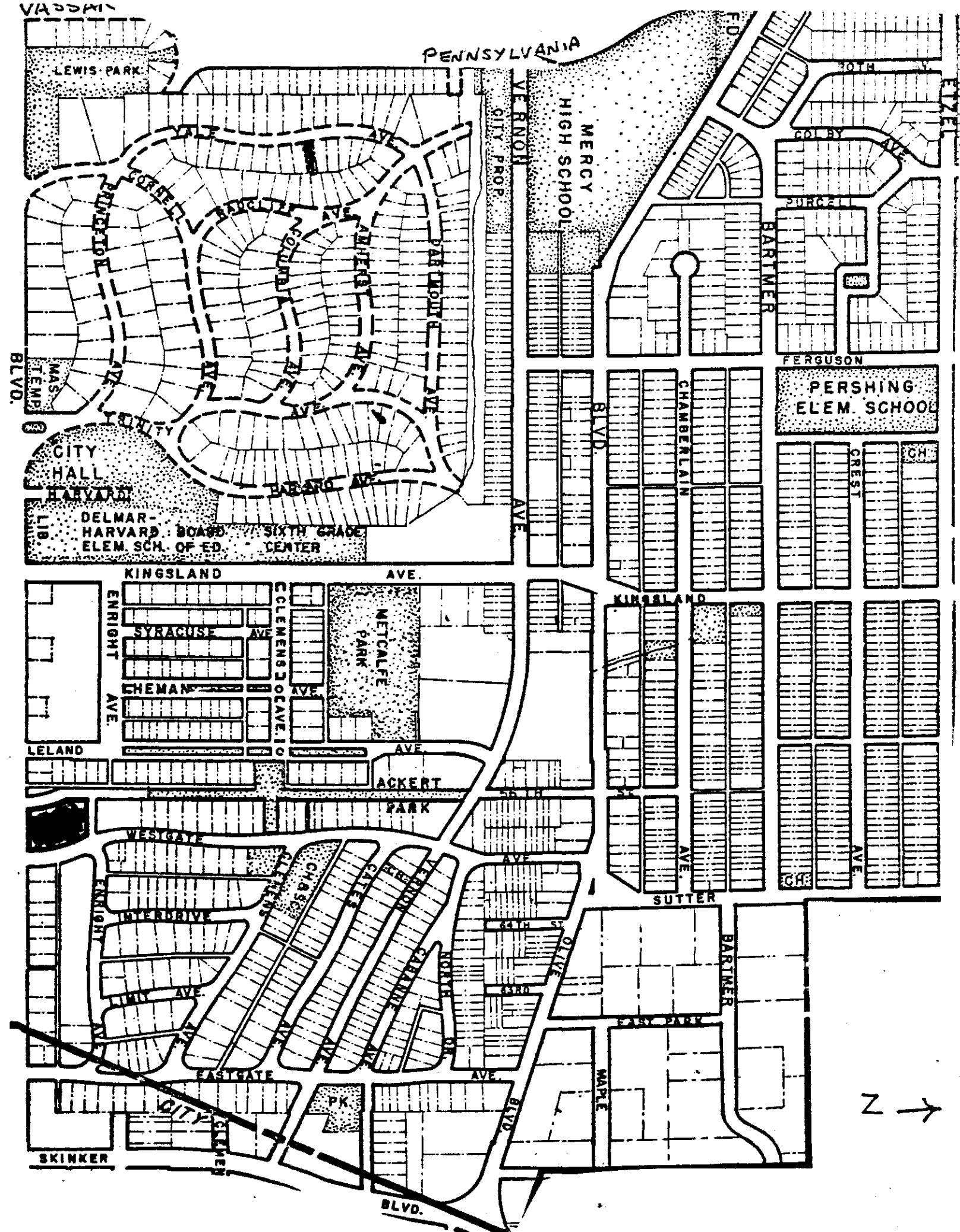
1954

Clayton, MO.

Scale: 1:24,000

UTM Reference

15/734560/4281860



DONALDSON COURT APARTMENTS 1 of 10

University City, MO 63130

Photographer: Esley Hamilton, 5/81

Neg.Loc.: St. Louis Co. Parks & Rec.

1723 Mason Rd.

St. Louis MO 63131

View of Buildings B, C, & D (607, 611 and  
615 Westgate Ave) from SE



DONALDSON COURT APARTMENTS 2 of 10

University City, MO 63130

Photographer: Esley Hamilton, 5/81

Neg.Loc.: St. Louis Co. Parks & Rec.  
1723 Mason Rd.

St. Louis MO 63131

View of Buildings A & B (601-603 and 607  
Westgate Ave) from N.



DONALDSON COURT APARTMENTS 3 of 10

University City, MO 63130

Photographer: Esley Hamilton, 5/81

Neg.Loc.: St. Louis Co. Parks & Rec.  
1723 Mason Rd.

St. Louis MO 63131

View of Building A (601-603 Westgate Ave)  
from NE showing walkway between A & B





DONALDSON COURT APARTMENTS 4 of 10

University City, MO 63130

Photographer: Esley Hamilton, 5/81

Neg.Loc.: St. Louis Co. Parks & Rec.

1723 Mason Rd.

St. Louis MO 63131

View of Building A from N showing detail of  
entry to 602 Westgate Ave.



DONALDSON COURT APARTMENTS 5 of 10

University City, MO 63130

Photographer: Esley Hamilton, 5/81

Neg.Loc.: St. Louis Co. Parks & Rec.

1723 Mason Rd.

St. Louis M 63131

View of Building A from SE (6501-6523  
Delmar Blvd) as altered 1936 and 1971



DONALDSON COURT APARTMENTS      6 of 10  
University City, MO 63130  
Photographer: Esley Hamilton, 5/81  
Neg.Loc.: St. Louis Co. Parks & Rec.  
            1723 Mason Rd.  
            St. Louis M o63131  
View of Building A from S showing entry to  
6505 Delmar Blvd



DONALDSON COURT APARTMENTS 7 of 10

University city, MO 63130

Photographer: Esley Hamilton, 5/81

Neg.Loc.: St. Louis Co. Parks & Rec.

1723 Mason Rd.

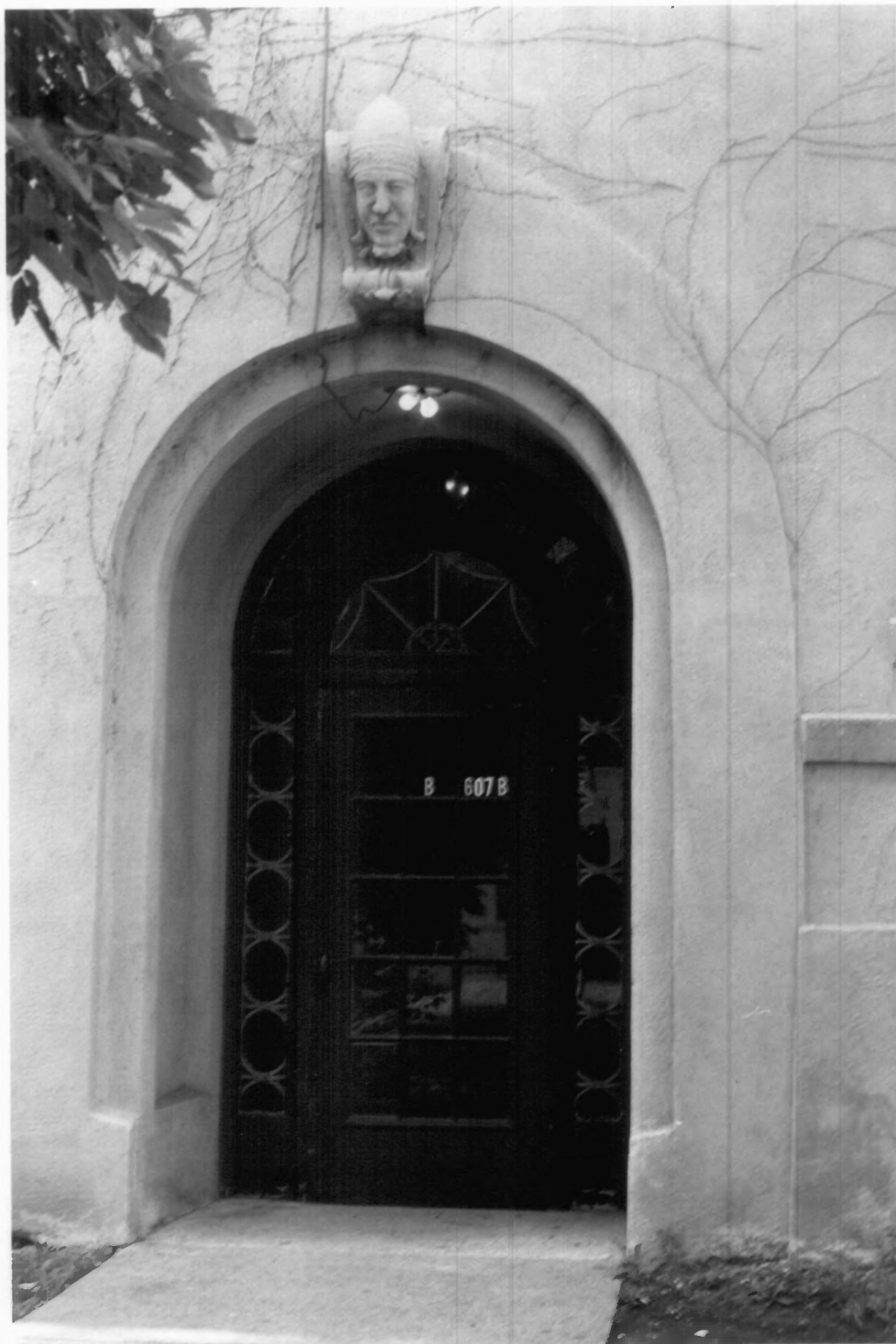
St. Louis MO 63131

View of Building C (611 Westgate Ave) from E





DONALDSON COURT APARTMENTS      8 of 10  
University City MO 63130  
Photographer: Esley Hamilton, 5/81  
Neg.Loc.: St. Louis Co. Parks & Rec.  
          1723 Mason Rd.  
          St. Louis MO 63131  
View of Building B (607 Westgate Ave) from N  
showing west entry



DONALDSON COURT APARTMENTS 9 of 10

Univeristy City MO 63130

Photographer: Esley Hamilton, 5/81

Neg.Loc.: St. Louis Co. Parks & Rec.  
1723 Mason Rd.

St. Louis MO 63131

View of Building C (left) and D (611 and  
615 Westgate Ave) from S



DONALDSON COURT APARTMENTS 10 of 10

University City Mo 63130

Photographer: Esley Hamilton, 5/81

Neg.Loc.: St. Louis Co. Parks & Rec.

1723 Mason Rd.

St. Louis MO 63131

View of Building D (615 Westgate Ave) from  
N



